



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Testimony presented to the Environment Committee of

The Connecticut General Assembly

By the Connecticut Department of Agriculture

March 16, 2012

**H.B. 5446 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PAYMENT PROCEDURE FOR THE
STERILIZATION AND VACCINATION OF CERTAIN DOGS AND CATS
AND PROVIDING FOR ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER TRAINING**

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture supports the intent of H.B. 5446 with respect to the training of Municipal Animal Control Officers.

Currently there are no mandated basic qualifications or training required for Municipal Animal Control Officers as there are for other public safety personnel. The Department believes that public safety requires that minimum qualifications and minimum training requirements are necessary for these law enforcement officers. Animal Control Officers are faced with a challenging variety of situations, individuals and animals. We believe that this very modest training and qualification requirement is necessary to ensure the safety of animal control officers, reduce potential municipal liability and provide for more uniform and effective enforcement of animal control law.

Connecticut General Statutes Section 22-330 states in part that “any municipal animal control officer in the municipality for which he has been appointed may *arrest any person* and may issue a written complaint and summons in furtherance thereof *for any violation of any law relating to dogs or to any domestic animal in the same manner police officers or constables may exercise in their respective jurisdictions.*” Connecticut law places significant power in the hands of municipal ACO’s and consequently, good judgment would indicate that they receive commensurate screening and training.

The job of animal control officer has evolved greatly from the days of the dog warden who only dealt with stray dogs and placed them in the pound. Animal control officers in Connecticut are now required to be prepared to face much more than in the past. Neighborhood disputes, identifying and handling potentially rabid animals, confronting vicious and dangerous animals and pursuing animal cruelty investigations are all to be expected in the course of a day.

It is imperative that today’s animal control officer receive proper training. As officers of the Court, it is necessary that these officers be trained in constitutional law other pertinent topics. A municipality that allows untrained law enforcement staff to make arrests and seize property places itself in jeopardy with respect to liability issues.

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Within the last year the Department of Agriculture's State Animal Control Division learned of a municipal animal control officer who was called to a complaint involving an emaciated dog. The animal control officer went to investigate and observed a dog in need of medical attention. Because the animal control officer was afraid to act improperly, they did not act in a suitable fashion and as a result the animal did not receive the appropriate level of care it needed. These situations are occurring at an increasing rate. As laws concerning animals are becoming more complex properly trained staff is becoming more of a necessity.

It is also an appropriate time to move forward and insure that veteran animal control officers receive continuing education and the new generations of animal control officers are the trained professionals that the citizens of Connecticut demand and deserve.

The department has introduced similar language in the past and would welcome working with the proponents of this proposal in an effort to craft a more robust bill that may be easier for municipalities to comply with.

Thank you for consideration of the views of the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.